

critical digest

VOL. IV No. 22

January 28, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Gertie-Plymouth, 1/30/52. Herman Shumlin presents British star Glynis Johns in Enid Bagnold's new play. Shumlin directed cast which also features Albert Dekker, Polly Rowles, Alan Napier and Patricia Wheel...Jane-Coronet, 2/2/52. Theatre Guild production of S.N.Behrman's play based on an original story by W.Somerset Maugham. Edna Best and Basil Rathbone star, directed by Cyril Rithard.

Digests of Current Reviews - more inside

Desire Under the Elms-ANTA Playhouse, 1/16/52. Weekly reviewers weren't as enthralled by ANTA's first subscription production as their daily colleagues. Several mild pros, an outright con, and a so-so were recorded. Time appraiser cracked that production leaves much to be desired under the elms. The O'Neill play, lacking in stature, tends to seem worse with the acting spelled out in italics. Francis, Billboard, was split in his opinion. While he tabbed Harold Clurman staged production perfectly, he feared the 1924 script had dated too much. Though most rated Carol Stone's performances as tops, Kahn, Variety, thought production brought Douglas Watson to stardom. Many of weekly critics commented that both Watson and Karl Malden were too mild for parts. Gibbs, New Yorker, pointed out that at times script, like many O'Neill plays, borders near parody.

The Shrike-Cort, 1/15/52. Jose Ferrer's triple threat talents as star-director and producer nominated him to join the great in the American theatre, in the opinion of several of the weekly reviewers. Though Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, and Shipley, New Leader, rapped Joseph Kramm script as too morbid to be interesting, majority praised all facets of Ferrer's talents as well as the supporting cast headed by Judith Evelyn. Gabriel, Cue, pondered that future of dynamic, powerfully expressive American theatre may depend on Ferrer, while Hobe, Variety, modified this in stating that our theatre needs more such three star men. Morehouse, WT&S, joined in praise parade by labeling Ferrer as coming close to world's best actor. Gibbs, New Yorker, praised play but questioned some of Kramm's medical and legal facts, while Time man was moved to raise questions about the city hospitals. Francis, Billboard, warned that script wasn't for ostrich-minded, but only for those who like raw meat.

Pal Joey-Broadhurst, 1/3/52. First "con" review for Styne, Key and Farrell revival of Rodgers and Hart 1940 musical filed by Shipley, New Leader. Not only was the acting not as deft as in the original, but the basic idea is no less repulsive now. The sexual parade of the flowers, Shipley continued, reaches the peak of bad taste. All in all it was like listening to good music while eating spoiled fish. George Jean Nathan was of exactly the opposite view. He found it in many respects much better than the original, though not the masterpiece its admirers have been bragging about. Cast headed by Vivienne Segal and Harold Lang were praised.

News & Notes

ANTA News: Desire Under the Elms extended two weeks...ANTA will join Metropolitan Opera Funds Campaign to set up arts center at Columbus Circle...Greater NYC Chapter of ANTA held first meeting...ANTA has house seats to hits for sale at PL8-1205...Greek National Theatre visit in fall may be sponsored by ANTA...Appeal for student tickets for touring production made by ANTA...Christian Westphalen appointed ANTA coordinator.

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critical digest

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The American Psychological Association was organized in 1906, and since that time has been engaged in a constant effort to advance the science of psychology and to promote the highest standards of research and scholarship in the field. The Association's primary concern is with the advancement of the science of psychology, and it is for this purpose that it publishes this journal.

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' Green Room Department '
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HALL OF FAME...New Yorkers shouldn't take establishment of "Theatre Hall of Fame" by Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa. lying down, retorts Chapman, News. F&M set up its project in honor of John Durang, the first American born professional actor, born in Lancaster January 6, 1768. Chapman suggests New Yorkers set up their own "Hall of Fame" on Nassau Street, site of first US theatre in 1750. First nomination by the critic would be for the "female theatregger" who has kept the drama alive in this country.

COLUMN TIPS...Rodgers and Hammerstein considering charging \$20 per seat for the best seats to Mary Martin's next musical, hints Winchell...General manager and press agent of Stalag 17 are waging private war, whispers Kilgallen...Mel Ferrer will replace Jose Ferrer when latter has to leave The Shrike for other commitments, repeats Walker.

AWARD DAY...Variety, Billboard, Theatre Wing, ANTA, "Theatre World" and the dozens of clubs which present awards yearly should all present them in a single, gala evening, suggests Coleman, Mirror. This would state emphatically that the Fabulous Invalid is very much alive.

MINORITY REPORTS...Rave reviews for the Olivier Cleopatras don't impress Conniff, Journal American. Miss Leigh over-acted and Mr. Olivier was bored in the Shakespeare play, while customers were walking out on the Shaw piece...Fancy Meeting You Here, the quick flop of the Kaufmans was thoroughly enjoyed by WNBC Leon Pearson...WFUV Bob Kass panned The Shrike for being depressing and also repetitious.

POETIC PLAN...Press agent Tom Weatherly's lyrical "Lines for the Legitimate" sums up the current drama scene like this: "The stage is in a slump all right; but the cure's as plain as plain -- Please, Lord, send down more playwrights -- who can really entertain."

LEGIT SURVEYS...Canine stars of shows compiled by "Your Dog" magazine shows that four legged actors doing better than two legged hams,, concludes Sylvester, News. Best dog year was 1937 when the breed was represented in Storm Over Patsy, Yellow Jack, Awake and Sing, Victoria Regina, Anything Goes and The Barretts of Wimpole Street...Onstage eating has become hazardous this season, comments Torre, WT&S. Julie Harris in I Am A Camera downs a raw egg and Worcestershire sauce nightly, plus four glasses of champagne (ginger ale). While Anna Christie's Grace Valentine has two schooners of beer per performance. Henry Fonda in Point of No Return substitutes yogurt for the soft boiled eggs. The Moon Is Blue's Donald Cook uses water and cola instead of more potent liquid. And Gigi's star Audrey Hepburn munches on raw carrots and licorice sticks throughout.

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' Legit Stuff '
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Gertrude Lawrence awarded members of her Columbia University acting class \$500 in prizes...Terry Saunders subs for Hollywood bound Dorothy Sarnoff in The King and I Bucknell University received \$15,000 endowed scholarship for music students set up by Irving Berlin...Knopf's trying to get Sir Cedric Hardwicke to write his autobiography, says Sobol...Ethel Merman leaves Call Me Madam May 31, may play month in Washington before making film version...John Gielgud plans to bring The Winter's Tale and Much Ado About Nothing to Broadway next year.

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' Meet the Critic - Elinor Hughes '
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Boston theatre bookings by NY managers are too eccentric, Elinor Hughes, Boston Herald drama editor and critic, told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. While a week or two may go by with no openings, Boston fans and critics are then faced with two or three attractions opening on the same Monday night, the femme reviewer explained. Though Boston usually has a good theatre season it just isn't sensible to have two openings on the same night, when one could so easily be switched.

While chances of a producer winning back his expenses of the usual two week Boston stand are slim, many producers insist on trying out their shows in Boston first, she stated. Because Boston audiences are independent the producer has a chance to find out what he really has. It's part of the drama critic's job in tryout towns like Boston, Philadelphia and New Haven to tell the producer what can be done to strengthen his show. As a rule, Boston audiences like musicals and light comedies, while serious plays usually have trouble unless a star is featured, or unless the attraction is backed by the Theatre Guild subscription list.

Because of the limited two week run of shows trying out, Boston drama critics have a limited effect on ticket sales. But unanimous panning of a play by all the critics can hurt the ticket sales, just as they can close a NY play, Hughes detailed. She sees her own role as critic as that of helping both audience and producer decide upon a given play. For the audience she states her own views, carefully explaining that some may not agree. The critic becomes valuable, she believes, when the reader gets to know him and can rely on his judgment. She also encourages good local theatre such as the Brattle Theatre and college productions.

Hughes, who doubles as film critic, has been drama editor of the Herald since 1934, wanted to be a part of the theatre since she was 13 when she saw Walter A. Hampden play Hamlet in Boston. After her graduation from Radcliffe College she joined the Herald as assistant to the famed Boston critic Phillip Hale. She became drama editor after Hale's retirement. Besides the usual interviews and reviews of films and plays, Hughes, like all daily critics in tryout towns, files a report on the show to the NY Times. She is the author of two books, "Passing Through to Broadway" in 1949 and a two volume "Famous Stars of Filmdom" in 1932. She also files a regular Boston column for "Hollywood Reporter."

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Come of Age- City Center 1/23/52. Guthrie McClintic's limited run production of the controversial 1934 verse play with music by Clemence Dane and Richard Addinsell won a split decision from current daily reviewers, with slight majority on the pro side. Most praised Judith Anderson's portrayal in her original role and Muriel Rahn's singing; though there was a wide difference of opinion over the acting talents of newcomer Robert Brown. Kerr, Herald Tribune, pointed out that play is object lesson which proves that no play is so bad that it don't win a band of admirers who want it revived the moment it flops. He termed it a little horror. Watts, Post, stuck to his original opinion that verse play is basically hollow and pretentious. McClain, Journal American, admitted he didn't know what play was all about. Coleman, Mirror, and Pollock, Compass, both suggested in their mild pro notices that play would go better in smaller house. Atkinson, Times, commented that play itself was weak, but that brilliant acting filled out the evening. Shaeffer, Eagle, recommended production be moved to regular Broadway house for a run. Several of the critics who panned show admitted that first nighters seemed to enjoy the proceedings. Hawkins, WY&S, feels production proves that fans of script were justified in their continued campaign. Times man believes that the star seems better in current production because she seems to have much more insight into her role. Music won more praise than verse, which was marked off by most as poor.

